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Westover Medical leads UK charge for Biophysical's biomarker test

Biophysical, a US developer of biomarker-based technologies, is set to make its Biophysical250 test available in the UK through an exclusive licensing deal with Westover Medical. The deal, of which financial terms were not disclosed, will see Westover, a UK-based private healthcare provider, offer the test in its two existing clinics in London and in a third to be opened in the capital later this year.

The product tests over 250 biomarkers for the detection of a wide spectrum of treatable conditions. These include cardiovascular disease; breast, colon, liver, ovarian, prostate and pancreatic cancers; metabolic disorders; autoimmune disease; hormonal imbalance; and nutritional deficiencies. The test incorporates a method called "stacking", whereby multiple biomarkers are used to test for particular diseases as a way of increasing the accuracy of the results. For instance, there are 33 biomarkers for cardiovascular disease alone.

According to Biophysical, the test is superior to existing methods of diagnosing illnesses as it provides a comprehensive overview of a patient's health with approximately two tablespoons (30ml) of blood and the sampling lasts 30 minutes (after which results are delivered 15 business days later). Although existing methods of blood sampling take roughly the same amount of time, up to one litre of blood is required. In addition, Westover's price of £2,200 ($4,400) compares favourably to the combined price of testing for all the conditions individually in the US ($40,000).

Sales boosted by media

Chairman and CEO of Biophysical Dr Mark Chandler describes the test as being "the most comprehensive health assessment available anywhere", distancing the product from any serious competition. He told *Clinica* that since the product's launch in the US in February 2006, media interest in the Biophysical250 had helped ramp up orders from hundreds to thousands per month in the US and improve the company's profile.

Coverage on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* of the company's BiophysicalYou anti-ageing test had brought Biophysical to a wider audience but it was an article in the UK *Financial Times* that profiled the test to businesses' boardroom-level employees.

The *FT* article in October 2007 commented that Biophysical "markets the test to top executives, political leaders, astronauts – the sort of people whose good health could be critical to companies' or governments' fortunes". It was after this, Dr Chandler said, that the company was inundated with interest from law firms, banks and similar businesses; a target customer base that Biophysical hopes to replicate in the UK this year.

Biophysical250 requires two tablespoons of blood compared to the one-litre sample if the tests were performed separately

However, Dr Chandler indicated that the UK market may be a tougher nut to crack than other European countries, owing to the reserved nature of Britons when it comes to discussing health matters. He also pointed out that Biophysical had chosen private healthcare provider Westover as a partner in the UK, as its clinics allot one hour of physician time to its patients, as opposed to the average of four minutes dedicated by doctors in the UK National Health Service and the seven minutes by GPs in the US.

International roll-out

The product has also been launched in Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Canada. In addition, there are commercialisation agreements for Germany, Switzerland and Austria that are expected to close over the next 4-6 months, according to Dr Chandler.

While the Biophysical250 remains the flagship product for Austin, Texas-based Biophysical, the company is also developing new biomarker-based health assessment services to add to its portfolio. Dr Chandler, who has much experience in the diagnostics sector, was once dubbed by *Forbes* magazine "the Indiana Jones" of medical research for his research in rainforests for potential medicines derived from plant toxins, He also co-founded bioassay developer Luminex in 1995 and biomarker testing services provider Rules-Based Medicine in 1998, before going on to form Biophysical, which was established in 2005.

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